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ABSTRACT

A study was done of college students' current perceptions of the most and least important characteristics of an ideal professor. These perceptions were compared with findings from earlier studies, and differences among student groups (based on gender, college status, grade point average (GPA), and majors) were compared. The study surveyed 356 students enrolled in psychology and special education classes of whom 119 were men and 237 were women. The survey instrument was a questionnaire of proven reliability that used a Likert-type scale to rate characteristics. Findings of the study indicated that there were a number of agreements as to the characteristics of an ideal professor among students over the past 25 years: students feel that the professor should know and be interested in the subject matter, should serve the needs of the students, present materials so that students can understand it, and have definite standards in grading students' tests and assignments. Differences were found among the student groups with freshmen viewing the ideal professor as a researcher and other groups seeing the ideal as one who is concerned primarily with students. Included are 7 tables and 14 references. (JB)

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A COMPARISON OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF AN IDEAL PROFESSOR

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated (a) students' current perceptions of the most and least important characteristics of an ideal professor and compared the findings with those previously reported and (b) differences among students groups (gender, college status, GPA, and programs students were enrolled) on criteria descriptive of an ideal professor. There were 356 students who participated in the present study. The findings indicated that there were a great deal of agreements on the most and least important criteria of an ideal professor among student groups throughout the country over the period of over 25 years. Differences were also found among the groups studied as to students' views of an ideal professor. Most of the criteria selected by the students were those which focused on their interests and needs.

INTRODUCTION

For years, researchers have attempted to identify the characteristics that students' view were descriptive of a quality instructor. Profiles of teachers (McComas, 1965; Shane, 1965) and characteristics of an ideal professor questionnaires (Quick & Wolfe, 1965; Vaughn, 1966; Stewart & Malpass, 1966; Elmore & Pohlmann, 1978) have been published. Other researchers (Marsh, 1984; Marsh, Fleiner & Thomas, 1975; Rayder, 1968) sought students' impressions of their professors. All these researchers attempted to (a) identify the characteristics of a

quality professor which would assist in establishing effective communication between the students and their instructors and (b) develop an instrument which would objectively evaluate the professors' performances. The purposes of the present study were to: (a) investigate students' current perceptions of the most and least important characteristics of an ideal professor and compare the findings with those reported previously and (b) determine if there were significant differences among the student groups (gender, college status, GPA, and programs) on criteria descriptive of an ideal professor.

METHOD

There were 356 students, enrolled in psychology and special education classes at a state university, who participated in the study. In this group, there were 119 men and 237 women, of which 69 were freshmen, 81 were sophomores, 114 were juniors, 53 were seniors, and 39 were graduates. Students reported their grade-point averages (GPA). With this information, students were assigned to four GPA groups: 1.80 - 2.50 (n = 69), 2.51 - 3.00 (n = 121), 3.01 - 3.50 (n = 76), and 3.51 - 4.00 (n = 65). Twenty-five students did not report their GPA's. In this group, 183 students were enrolled in the teacher training program and 173 students were enrolled in other programs on campus.

The instrument used to collect the data was the Students' Views of An Ideal Professor (Gadzella, 1966). The reliability of the instrument has been previously determined (Lytton & Gadzella, 1991). The instrument consists of 25 characteristics

describing a quality professor suggested by students. All criteria are stated positively. Subjects in the present study rated each criterion on a 5-point Likert scale, in which 5 = most important, 4 = important, 3 = average importance, 2 = below average importance, and 1 = least important. The data were entered into the computer and analyzed in various ways.

RESULTS

The criteria of the ideal professor and means for each criterion for the total group studied here are presented in Table A. The five most important and five least important characteristics of an ideal professor for the total group and for men and women is presented in Table 1. The criteria selected as most important were that the professor had knowledge and was interested in the subject matter s/he teaches, was flexible in meeting students' needs, presented materials so that students could understand it, and had definite standards in grading. The least important criteria were that the professor was engaged in writing books and articles, particpated in community projects, was appropriately dressed, and organized and participated in research studies. There seemed to be a great deal of consensus between the men and women on these criteria.

These data were compared with responses of five other student groups who responded to the questionnaire in different parts of the country over a period of over 25 years. The data are summarized in Table 2. There is a great deal of agreement among the student groups on the five most and five least

important criteria of an ideal professor. These are similar to the ones described above.

An analysis of variance was used to determine if there were differences on the characteristics of an ideal professor between genders (see Table 3), among college status groups (see Table 4), among GPA groups (see Table 5), and between teacher trainees and all other (combined) classes (see Table 6).

Women had significantly higher means than men on three criteria: they felt the professor should be informal and establish rapport with students, provide appropriate assignments, and be available to students. Among the college status groups, there were differences on three criteria: with freshmen assigning the highest rating for a professor as a researcher; sophomores and juniors assigned the highest rating to the professor for promptly returning students' assignments; and freshmen, sophomores, and juniors assigned the highest rating to the professor for being available to the students.

Among the GPA groups, there was one significant difference with the graduates assigning the highest rating to the professor for having standards in grading tests and assignments. There were significant differences between the students enrolled in the teacher training program and those enrolled in all other (combined) programs. The teacher trainees rated an ideal professor higher on three criteria: on interrelating subject areas, being well prepared for courses and daily presentations, and having standards in grading. The students in the other (combined) programs, rated an ideal professor higher on two

criteria: on being a researcher and speaking loudly in class.

DISCUSSION

The findings in the present study show that, generally, there are a number of agreements as to the characteristics of an ideal professor among students throughout the country in a period of over 25 years. Students feel that the professor should know and be interested in the subject matter s/he teaches. Beyond that, the professor should serve the needs of the students, present materials so that students can understand it, and have definite standards in grading students' tests and assignments. Differences were found among the student groups. With the exception of the freshmen (who viewed the ideal professor as a researcher) other groups viewed the ideal professor as one who is concerned primarily about students and their needs. Specifically, the differences among student groups (gender, college status, GPA, and programs they were enrolled) provide instructors with information as to what different student groups expect of their professors.

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TABLE A

Number and Description of Characteristics of An Ideal Professor and Means For the Total Group

Number	Characteristic	M
1	- Has knowledge of subject matter	4.84
2	- Is interested in subject matter	4.63
3	- Interrelates subject areas	3.84
4	- Presents different points of view	4.22
5	- Organizes and participates in research	3.29
6	- Writes books and articles	2.38
7	- Participates in community projects	2.56
8	- Is flexible in meeting students' needs	4.53
9	- Encourages students' participation	4.22
10	- Has a sense of humor	3.96
11	- Presents material so students understand	4.48
12	- Speaks clearly and loud	4.22
13	- Establishes good rapport with students	4.28
14	- Respects students' views	4.22
15	- Is interested in teaching students	4.28
16	- Is punctual for classes	3.75
17	- Is appropriately dressed	3.23
18	- Has daily lessons and course well organized	4.26
19	- Provides list of supplementary references	3.33
20	- Presents sufficient material in lectures	3.99
21	- Uses various methods of teaching	4.12
22	- Gives sufficient number assignments	4.04
23	- Has definite standards in grading	4.29
24	- Is prompt in returning assignments and tests	4.02
25	- Is available for student conferences	4.19

TABLE 1

Comparison of the Five Most and Five Least Important Characteristics of An Ideal Professor For the Total, Men and Women at ETSU

Importance	Characteristic Number		
	Total	Men	Women
Most Important	1	1	1
2nd Most Important	2	2	2
3rd Most Important	8	8	8
4th Most Important	11	11	11
5th Most Important	23	23 and 9	23
Least Important	6	6	6
2nd Least Important	7	7	7
3rd Least Important	17	17	17
4th Least Important	5	9	5
5th Least Important	19	5	19

TABLE 2

Comparison of the Five Most and Five Least Important Charcateristics of An Ideal Professor For Students on ETSU, WSU-O, WWSC, and SUCNY-NP Campuses

Importance	Characteristics Number				
	ETSU-b	ETSU-a	WSU-O	WWSC	SUCNY-NP
Most Important	1	1	1	1	1
2nd Most Important	2	2	2	2	2
3rd Most Important	8	8	8	8	8
4th Most important	11	13	11	18	13
5th Most Important	23	14	18	11	14
Least Important	6	6	6	6	17
2nd Least Important	7	7	7	7	6
3rd Least Important	17	17	17	5	7
4th Least Important	5	5	16	17	16
5th Least Important	19	19	5	16	24

ETSU-b - East Texas State University, Commerce, Texas, Fall 1991 (n = 356)
ESTU-a - East Texas State University, Commerce, Texas, Spring 1991 (n = 86)
WSU-O - Wisconsin State University-Oshkosh, Wisconsin, 1967, (n = 678)
WWSC - Western Washington State College, Bellingham, Washington, 1968a, (n = 443)
SUCNY-NP - State University College of New York at New Paltz, N.Y., 1968b, (n = 1145).

TABLE 3

Means, Standard Deviations, and F-rtaios for Three Characteristics of An Ideal Professor for Men (n = 119) and Women (n 237), df = 1/354

Characteristic	Group	M	SD	F ratio	p
Is informal, establishes rapport	Men	4.12	0.81	7.70	.0055*
	Women	4.36	0.77		
Provides appropriate assignments	Men	3.88	0.94	5.56	.0188*
	Women	4.11	0.84		
Is Available to students	Men	4.05	0.87	5.55	.0185*
	Women	4.26	0.76		

*p < .05

TABLE 4

Means, Standard Deviations, and F-ratios For Three Criteria of An Ideal Professor For College Status Groups: Freshman (n = 69), Sophmore (n =81), Juniors (n = 114), Seniors (n = 53) and Graduates (n = 39), df = 4/351

Characteristic	Group	M	SD	F-ratio	p
Is a researcher	Freshman	3.68	0.90	4.29	.0021*
	Sophmore	3.33	1.00		
	Junior	3.16	0.97		
	Senior	3.26	1.04		
	Graduate	2.97	1.04		
Is prompt in returning assignments	Freshman	3.81	1.00	2.45	.0463*
	Sophmore	4.10	0.87		
	Junior	4.18	0.80		
	Senior	3.92	0.92		
	Graduate	3.90	0.85		
Is avialable to students	Freshman	4.29	0.79	2.59	.0363*
	Sophmore	4.26	0.80		
	Junior	4.26	0.75		
	Senior	4.02	0.84		
	Graduate	3.90	0.85		

*p < .05

TABLE 5

Means, Standard Deviations, and F-ratios for A Characteristic of An Ideal Professor For Group GPA: 1.80 - 2.50 (n = 69), 2.51 - 3.00 (n = 121), 3.01 - 3.50 (n = 76), and 3.51 - 4.00 (n = 65), df = 3/327

Characteristic	Group	M	SD	F-ratio	p
Has Standards in grading tests and assignments	1.80-2.50	4.19	0.86	3.22	.0229*
	2.51-3.00	4.20	0.88		
	3.01-3.50	4.29	0.76		
	3.51-4.00	4.55	0.61		

*p < .05

TABLE 6

Means, Standard Deviations, and F-ratios For Five Characteristics of An Ideal Professor For Combined Classes (n = 173) and Teacher Training (n = 183) Groups, df = 1/354

Characteristic	Group	M	SD	F-ratio	p
Interrelates subject areas	Combined	3.76	0.72	4.92	.0265*
	Teacher T.	3.92	0.69		
Is a researcher	Combined	3.46	0.96	9.64	.0019*
	Teacher T.	3.14	1.02		
Speakes loudly	Combined	4.31	0.77	3.99	.0452*
	Teacher T.	4.14	0.79		
Is well prepared for course and daily presentations	Combined	4.14	0.72	7.10	.0077*
	Teacher T.	4.37	0.72		
Has standards in grading	Combined	4.11	0.86	18.30	.0000*
	Teacher T.	4.46	0.70		

*p < .05